

A better approach to brucellosis control

By Independent Record - 09/24/08

Federal officials at last are at work on a sensible plan regarding brucellosis and the cattle industry.

Rather than impose sanctions against livestock ranchers statewide when two cases of the disease are discovered, the new approach would recognize that the problem exists in and around the Yellowstone National Park region and would affect only that area.

Any why not? Why should the cattle industry in northern Montana, or in the Helena area for that matter, be impacted by a problem that apparently is limited to the Yellowstone region? That's where the two recent brucellosis cases were recently discovered, not elsewhere in Montana, yet stricter disease testing costing ranchers some \$6 to \$12 million is being imposed statewide. Similar sanctions are possible soon in Wyoming.

Under the new system under consideration, a zone around Yellowstone in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho would be administered separately, acknowledging that it is not cattle-to-cattle infections that are the main problem, but rather infections coming from wildlife such as elk in the region.

The new plan isn't a done deal. Its details will have to be reviewed by veterinarians and other parties from other states who need to be convinced that the change wouldn't increase the risk of brucellosis spreading elsewhere in the country. Montana state veterinarian Marty Zaluski said it could be six months to a year before the new system could be enacted.

But the basic idea is sound. Imposing sanctions on a whole state in response to a problem affecting only a small part of it never made a lot of sense.